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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000239

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SUBJECT: USING SLOVAKIA'S ELECTION TO THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Lawrence R. Silverman, for Reasons 1.4 b and d

1. (C) Slovakia's election on May 21 to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) is seen here as a significant step in the country's effort to carve out a bigger space for itself in the international arena. Following its successful tenure on the UN Security Council (2006-7), the HRC bid was the logical next move. Ironically, however, Slovakia's campaign for the HRC coincided with some discordant trends in both foreign and domestic policy. At home, the government fought hard (and successfully) to pass legislation imposing a tough right of reply requirement on the press and is also trying to limit funding to NGO's, and thus, potentially, their activities. Slovak foreign policy activism under the auspices of Prime Minister Robert Fico has, in a certain sense, "shrunk." Fico's interests are predominantly domestic and economic; his foreign policy priorities -- Euro accession, foreign trade, and promoting better ties with Russia -- reflect those interests. Slovak foreign assistance decreased this year and so has the government's willingness to speak out on human rights issues. Despite these trends, we continue to believe that, given Slovakia's history, it can play a constructive role in helping other societies make the transition to democracy. When pressed by us, for example, the MFA issued a good statement on Cuba Solidarity Day. Therefore, Post plans to use Slovakia's seat on the UN HRC -- and the commitments it has undertaken in this context -- as tools to engage the GOS more broadly on a range of human rights issues (including, when appropriate, in the domestic context) and to promote greater foreign policy activism.

2. (U) Text of MFA Statement on Slovakia's election to the UN Human Rights Council:

The Slovak Republic achieved a remarkable diplomatic success by gaining a seat in the UN Human Rights Council, based in Geneva. The UN member countries voted in favor of the Slovak candidacy in the elections held during the 62nd UN General Assembly session on May 21, 2008 in New York. Slovakia competed together with Ukraine and Serbia for only two vacant posts within the central and Eastern European countries regional group. Slovakia won the support of 135 UN member countries.

The Slovak Republic becomes for the very first time a member of this important body responsible for monitoring the protection of human rights worldwide. In the past, Slovakia did not sit on the former UN Commission on Human Rights, replaced by the current council in 2006.

The UN Human Rights Council has 47 member countries elected proportionally from all regions of the world. The membership in this body is considered a prestigious matter and is

time-limited. Slovakia's term of office will last three years. At present, the European Union is represented in the Council by seven of its member states.

The Slovak Republic is fully committed to the universal promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Slovakia is a party to almost all international legal instruments in the area of human rights protection and humanitarian law. As a non-permanent member of the UNSC in 2006-7, the Slovak Republic was supporting the idea of creating the Human Rights Council aimed at strengthening human rights protection mechanisms within the UN.

During its membership in the Human Rights Council, the Slovak Republic would like to play a positive and constructive role in the development and protection of human rights. We are convinced that the Council should respond promptly to all cases of gross and systematic violations of human rights regardless of where they happen. Slovakia will make efforts to ensure that the resolutions and recommendations adopted by the Council are viewed upon as encouragement for the countries concerned to achieve concrete improvements and progress in human rights protection on the ground. The Slovak Republic intends to pay attention to the advancement of human rights in all its categories, including political, civic, economic, social and cultural rights.

OBSITNIK